

(Power From on High) 3. the Wise and Foolish Virgins; Or, the Holy Spirit and the Coming of the Lord

by A.B. Simpson

The sermon emphasizes the importance of receiving the Holy Ghost for preparation for the Lord's coming and for being part of the Bride of Christ.

Scripture: Matthew 25:1

Topics: "The Holy Spirit", "Preparation for Christ's Return"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the critical distinction between the wise and foolish virgins in the parable, illustrating that both groups were morally upright and awaiting the bridegroom, yet only the wise were prepared with oil for their lamps, symbolizing the necessity of the Holy Spirit for true readiness for Christ's return. He warns that mere belief in the Lord's coming is insufficient without the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit, which is essential for a vibrant Christian life. The sermon stresses the urgency of being filled with the Spirit, as time is short and the consequences of being unprepared are dire, leading to exclusion from the joy of the marriage feast. Simpson calls believers to recognize the importance of personal preparation and the need to receive the Holy Spirit, urging them to act promptly to ensure they are ready for the Lord's return.

Transcript

"Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps." Matt. 25; 1-4.

The Gospel of Matthew is the Gospel of the King, and its latest chapters are full of the Master's teachings about His coming. The parable of the virgins is a picture of the attitude of the church at the coming of the Lord, and the necessity of the Holy Ghost in order to prepare us for that great event.

The ten virgins, like the ten servants in the parable of the pounds, represent the whole church. The church is often represented in the Scriptures under the figure of a woman. It is an unnecessary and irrelevant strain to try to make a distinction between the virgins and the bride, and assume that the bride is somewhere in the background of the parable, and in a still higher place than the wise virgins. If that were

so, it is strange that the Lord makes no reference to so important a part of the dramatis personae in any of these closing discourses. The truth is, that which is elsewhere represented by the bride is here represented by the virgins. Sometimes the church is called a bride, sometimes a building, sometimes a body, sometimes disciples, servants, virgins; but it is always the same church, and all that is necessary in the interpretation is to simply work out the figure used in each case, consistently with itself, and not to drag in every other feature and accompaniment which a lively fancy may suggest. As well might we try to work out an hypothesis for the mother in the parable of the prodigal son, or to find a meaning for all the figures introduced in the necessary drapery of any of the parables. The Great Teacher has one object in view in this great parable -- to show the need of special preparation for the Lord's coming, and we only confuse the mind, and detract from the simple object of the lesson when we try to bring in a whole system of theology.

I. THE POINTS OF RESEMBLANCE BETWEEN THE WISE AND FOOLISH VIRGINS.

1. They were both virgins. They were both separated and pure. It is possible to have a blameless character, to have come out from the world and to be faultlessly right, moral, and correct in our life, and yet be devoid of the Holy Ghost and unprepared for the Lord's return.

2. Both were looking for the coming of the bridegroom. They had all gone out with this one object and were definitely expecting and preparing for him. And so we may fully believe in the doctrine of the Lord's return, may be deeply interested in it, may be personally desiring and expecting it, and yet may be, if we are without the Holy Ghost, unprepared for it, and be found among the foolish virgins at the last.

3. They both Slumbered and slept. The Greek word for 'slumbered', literally means 'nodded'. It vividly describes the drowsiness that gradually creeps over one, until, at last, unwillingly and almost unconsciously, he falls asleep. It implies that, even at the very best, the people of God are more than half asleep. And yet it is a very different thing to doze with the oil in your vessels, than to fall asleep utterly unprepared for your Master's appearing.

4. Both were called just before the Bridegroom came. How gracious it was of the Master to send word to the sleeping virgins! He has promised us that "that day shall not overtake us as a thief." And even the foolish virgins were awakened at the last moment, and were aware of the Master's near approach. But, alas! it did not avail them now; it was too late to obtain the oil and prepare their dying lamps for the glorious procession that welcomed their King's return.

There was much, very much, in their favor. Just one thing they lacked. But it was enough to prevent their entering in. God help us all to make sure of "that one thing needful!"

II. THE DIFFERENCE.

What then was the difference between these two classes of virgins? What was the secret of failure on the part of the foolish ones?

1. Five were wise and five were foolish. It is not enough for us to be earnest and well meaning. God expects us also to be intelligent, instructed, and wise. "Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." "See that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil."

It will be no excuse for us in the day of His coming that we did not know what He expected of us. He has given us full instructions, and to neglect His word is evidence of guilty and careless disobedience. How many are defaulting in their life and service because they do not even understand the truth about their Master's coming, and the Bible is to them a sealed book! God make us wise!

2. The foolish virgins were impulsive, shallow, enthusiastic, and lacking in real solid and lasting qualities. This is indicated by the simple statement that the first thing that the foolish virgins thought about was their lamps, and the first thing that the wise thought about was their vessels and the oil that filled them. The one looked at the transient flame; the other at the abiding source of life and light. The one represents the present people; the other the permanent people with whom we are always coming in contact.

John Bunyan expresses the difference by his two characters of Passion and Patience. The one wanted everything now; the other wanted that which he would have at the end.

3. But the supreme difference between the wise and foolish virgins was the fact that the foolish virgins took their lamps only, and the others took the oil in their vessels. This, we need hardly say, expresses these two great facts and experiences; namely, a Christian life and the baptism with the Holy Ghost. The burning lamp represents the spiritual life which has been kindled by the Holy Ghost; the oil in the vessels with the lamps represents the Holy Ghost Himself, personally received in the consecrated heart.

There is an infinite difference between these two facts. The apostles before Pentecost and the apostles after Pentecost represent this difference.

The vessel, of course, is our personality -- spirit, soul, and body; the oil is the Holy Ghost who comes to the yielded and obedient heart to control it, and fill it with the fullness of God. This is the true preparation for a life of holiness and for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

With this we are ready to meet Him when He appears, and although we may have but a few moments to prepare, and may even nod and sleep at times, we have the secret of the Lord within us, and "we shall be found of Him in peace."

This is the great question which God is pressing upon His church today. "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" This is the great mark of distinction between Christians and Christians. Beloved, let us make no mistake, but let us be filled with the Spirit and so "give all diligence to make our calling and election sure."

III. THE EFFECTS UPON BOTH CLASSES.

1. The wise virgins were ready, and after a few moments of immediate preparation were received to the marriage feast and the joy of their Lord.

2. The foolish virgins woke to find their lamps expiring. "Give us of your oil," they cried, "for our lamps are going out." They were not able to supply their lamps from the vessels of the wise. These needed all the oil they had for the great occasion which had come, and there was none to spare for the lamps of the other virgins.

It is true that the Holy Ghost is indivisible, and we cannot give part of our blessing to another. If we have Him, we have Him personally and He cannot be separated into parts. We need all His fullness for our own preparation. We may lead others to Him and help them to receive Him, but they must take Him for

themselves.

3. We may receive even this blessing too late. It would seem to be implied that the Holy Spirit might still be secured, even at the very moment of the Lord's return, but "while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and they that were ready went in, and the door was shut."

There will be, doubtless, many spiritual blessings poured out upon the world immediately after the Parousia of our blessed Master, and the translation of His waiting Bride; but it will be too late to enter into the joys of the marriage, and escape the sorrows of the great tribulation. Time is one of the factors in every great question, and it is not only well for us to obey God's call, but it is essential to obey it promptly. The very essence of obedience is, "redeeming the time" -- the very point of time -- "because the days are evil."

O beloved, let us not lose a moment before we receive the baptism of the Holy Ghost! There is not an hour to spare. We are in solemn days, and we are neither ready to live nor to die, nor to meet our coming Lord, without the Holy Ghost.

There is something very suggestive in this figure of buying. The traders in this case do not represent any body of men who can sell us the Holy Ghost; they simply represent the divine sources from which we receive Him, the divine method which God has provided. There is a sense in which we buy Him by making Him our own. When we buy a thing, it becomes our own property, and so we may receive the Holy Ghost for ourselves and claim Him as our very own.

In the early part of the parable the beautiful original expresses the idea very strongly. "They took their own lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom."

There is another sense, also, in which we buy. We must give up something. We must let something go, before we can receive the Holy Ghost. Indeed, we must let all go and then receive Him in His fullness.

A few weeks ago, as we were passing out of a large meeting, a sobbing girl was sitting near the aisle, and asked us to pray with her. Her heart was very heavy. She had come to the Gethsemane of life; she was letting go everything, and some of the things were very dear; but she was true to God and obedient to the heavenly calling. Less than a week afterwards, we were passing away from that place, and a friend came up to greet us and say goodbye. It was the same face, but we scarcely knew her, it was so transfigured. The light of heaven was shining in her beautiful countenance, and the joy and glory of the Lord had lighted up all her face. The sacrifice was past; the resurrection morning had come; she had let all go, and she had received Him.

There is still another sense in which we buy this great blessing. Christ has purchased it for us, and He says to us, "Come ye, buy and eat! yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price." The Holy Ghost is the purchased privilege of every believer. Beloved, come and receive Him, and receive Him at once, that you may be prepared for the trusts of life and the great Parousia.

4. The foolish virgins were excluded from the marriage of the Lamb. All that this means we dare not attempt to explain. That it does mean a difference, a mighty difference between the two classes of Christians, there can be no doubt, and that there shall be such a difference between those who shall meet the Master with joy, and those who meet Him with grief; between those who have confidence, and those who shall be ashamed before Him at His coming, the Bible leaves us no room to doubt.

Just what will be the peculiar privilege of those who enter in, and the severest loss of those who are excluded, it is presumptuous to attempt to define in detail; but it will be loss enough, sorrow enough, to be shut out of anything which our Master had for us; and the soul that is willing just to be saved and forego its crown and a place in the bosom of the Lord, is too ignoble almost to be saved. God write upon our hearts the solemn emphasis of that awful sentence, "the door was shut!"

5. But there was still a more solemn word, "I know you not." They came, they came perhaps with oil. They knocked; they begged for entrance, but He from within only answered, "I know you not." This, as has been shown by Dean Alford, is very different from the more terrible sentence addressed to others, "I never knew you." It is simply an intimation that they are not in the circle of His intimate personal friendship. He does not exclude them from salvation, but He excludes them from the place of the Bride, and the innermost center of His communion and love.

Beloved, what constitutes a bride? It is not wedding robes nor dowry nor surroundings. It is the heart of love that knows her bridegroom and responds to his affection. It is an interior preparation, and this is the preparation which the Holy Ghost is offering today to the children of God. He is calling out a Bride for the Lamb. He is saying to many a hesitating heart, "Hearken, O daughter, and consider; forget also thy kindred and thy father's house; so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty; for He is thy Lord, and worship thou Him."

The Holy Ghost is bringing those who are willing into a closer fellowship with Jesus, and giving them such an acquaintance with Him that in that day no bolts, nor bars, nor closed doors can keep them from the bosom of their Lord. They know Him and are known of Him; when He appears, His loving smile will recognize them and the magnetic attraction of His presence will draw them in a moment to His heart and His throne.

May God make us willing to receive this blessed preparation that we may be found ready at His coming!

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